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Memorial Sermon.

Mrs. Samuel T. Worrester.

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Memorial Sermon,

DELIVERED ON THE OCCASION OF THE DEATH OF

MRS. SAMUEL T. WORCESTER,

AT THE

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, NASHUA, N. H.,

SUNDAY, MAY 3d, 1874,

BY REV. FREDERICK ALVORD.

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SERMON.

JUDGE ME, O LORD, FOR I HAVE WALKED IN MINE INTEGRITY; I HAVE TRUSTED ALSO IN THE LORD; THEREFORE I SHALL NOT SLIDE.—PSALMS, XXVI: 1.

David, conscious of integrity, appeals to the Lord for judgment. This was a rock to his feet. He did not claim to be perfect, but he knew he had endeavored to lead an upright life. Integrity is wholeness of character in its controlling aim and purpose. The elements that enter into it are prophetic of perfection, and in their working and outcome will surely give perfection. So that to have a character whose germ is integrity is to have a character that will ere long bloom out into a perfect life. Possessing such a character, we can ask the Lord to judge us. He will not reject that which, in principle and aim, is right.

That this integrity, which is both the foundation and the promise of holiness, was conspicuous in the character of the friend whose loss we sorely feel, all who knew her well can testify. The withdrawal of such a life from among us calls for more than a passing notice. It leaves a vacancy which cannot soon nor easily be filled. I cannot do justice to my own feelings as her pastor, nor to the evident spirit and aim of her life, as these have passed under your eye for the last six years, without holding her portrait before you for a few

moments. It is not alone among the stronger sex that we find shining examples of goodness. Men have the advantage of women, in that their virtues and deeds are commonly better known. Hence we are in danger of giving men too much praise and women too little. I would not have women throw off that modesty which is both the charm and the safeguard of their characters, but I would have their virtues deservedly recognized and their deeds honored. I would not put them higher nor lower than men in the scale of worth. I would not compare them with men. They have no rivals in their sphere of duty as men have no rivals in theirs. They are worthy of equal honor, if they are equally faithful. Together man and woman constitute and illustrate human nature in its complex aspects and relations as it came from the hand of God.

Mrs. Samuel T. Worcester was born in Stoughton, Mass., April 2d, 1802. Her maiden name was Mary F. C. Wales. daughter of Samuel Wales, Esq. She came from that sturdy New England stock whose planting in this western world was the seed corn of the American Republic. The religious influences under which she was trained gave impulse and direction to a naturally strong character. From a child she was fond of books and spent more time in reading and study than is common for children. This predominant taste at length took the form of a desire for an education. She attended the common schools of her native town—then not as good as now—and subsequently for a time the schools in Boston, and finally completed her education under the private tuition of her pastor, the Rev. Dr. Calvin Park, father of Prof. Edwards A. Park of Andover Theological Seminary.

Children do not always know—and I fear parents too are

more ignorant than they ought to be—how much the pastor and the pulpit have to do in laying the foundations of their future usefulness. The records of eternity will show that many a young man and young woman received their first impulses to a noble life from the parsonage and the church. The educating power of our churches upon the young cannot be over-estimated. At the early age of twenty our friend made a voyage to the Cape Verde Islands where she spent nearly two years in the family of her brother-in-law, who was then residing there as United States consul This gave her a rare opportunity for enlarged observation and experience, and no doubt had much to do in developing those generous views of men and things which she possessed in an uncommon degree. Upon her return home life began to open before her in its reality. She was in the full bloom of womanhood. The period of pupilage and of dependence is past and of earnest work has come. She was willing to take the responsibility which her Heavenly Father was clearly laying upon her, and we can imagine her grappling with the question, which sooner or later every earnest soul must answer—"How can I make my life useful?"

And here begins what I will call her public life. When I say public life I do not speak untruthfully nor unbecomingly. It is more common, I allow, to speak of the public life of men than of women, and yet when we find one who under the orderings of Providence is largely released from domestic duties—who yearns to do good, and whose tastes and adaptations clearly fit her for doing good in more public ways and that too without any sacrifice of her womanly instincts—if such a woman actually serves the public faithfully and well, why should we not speak of her public life? Soon after her

return from the Islands, Miss Wales opened a private school in her native town. Subsequently she taught for a time in the Academy of Weymouth, and on leaving this position she became principal successively of the Female Seminaries in Newton and Charlestown, Mass. In choosing teaching for her probable life work, she did not mistake her gifts. It was in the line both of her own taste and of her desire to become useful. It opened just the field for her peculiar talents, and in their exercise she found the highest satisfaction. And from what we know of her later life, we can easily imagine with what love and even enthusiasm she engaged in her cherished work, how systematic she was, how attentive to details, how thorough in drill and discipline, and how solicitous for the right mental and moral development of her pupils. Fortunate indeed the scholars who came under the influence of her heart and the mould of her hand. She possessed many of those teaching qualities which have made the name of Mary Lyon and Mount Holyoke Seminary forever inseparable.

It was while she was teaching in the Female Seminary in Charlestown, that she first saw among her pupils that bright girl who afterwards became Mrs. Mary A. Livermore, whose untiring labors for the elevation of her sex are recognized on both sides of the ocean and even throughout the civilized world. The acquaintance then formed as the years passed ripened into friendship and became life-long. Miss Wales continued to teach until she was married to Samuel T. Worcester, Esq., which took place May 13th, 1835. The year before, Mr. Worcester had established himself in the practice of his profession in Norwalk, Ohio. And now begins the story of her life in Norwalk. Such a character does not lose

by change of residence. It oftener gains in sweep and power. We find the same zeal and unselfish devotion to the good of others there, as she manifested in her native State. She soon formed a literary society of both sexes, whose meetings were held at her own house. The time was occupied in various literary exercises and in conversation. Her aim was not only to impart useful information but to cultivate the literary taste, manners and morals of the members. This society continued its good work for several years. For some time she kept a private school of boarders and day scholars at her own house. As showing how she impressed herself upon her pupils and sought to bring out their best points, the following extract of a letter from one of them, written to Mrs. Worcester on learning of her illness, and received here the day after her death, speaks for itself:

"Memory brings back the day when you took me affectionately under your roof, gave me a place at your fireside and your board, and gave me new aspirations and encouragements that have made a better and more useful woman of me all my life thus far. This is why I feel that no one could possibly have a greater debt of gratitude to discharge than myself."

Her pupils scattered in different parts of the land rise up and call her blessed. She took a deep interest in the cause of common schools, and on one occasion while the Ohio school association was in session in Norwalk, she delivered a lecture before that body in which she urged the importance of doing more for the education of the children of the State. She took an active interest in the efforts of that association in elevating the standard of popular education and in procuring the enactment of the present Ohio State law—a model

of its kind—and which in some of its features has been copied by many of the western states. And to show her faith by her works, after the passage of this law, she formed an association in her own town for the clothing of poor children that they might attend the schools and enjoy the same advantages as the children of the rich. Her efforts for others did not stop here. During the civil war she organized a Soldiers' Aid Society, called the Alert club, composed mostly of young ladies, which had the reputation of doing more to furnish comforts for their brave and suffering soldiers in the field than any other similar organization in all that region; and so attached did the members of this club become to Mrs. Worcester that they presented her their photographs arranged in a large album. It is with great pleasure, I add, that during many years of her residence in Norwalk she was an efficient teacher in the Sabbath school connected with the Presbyterian church where she and her husband worshipped.

And now there comes a turning point in her life. Her work in Norwalk is done. She leaves precious memories and enduring monuments behind her, and with her husband returns to New England, near the loved scenes of her early days. She finds a home in this city, here to spend the brief remnant of her life. Thirty-two years have left their mark upon her. She is older now, but none the less youthful and benevolent in her feelings and scarcely less vigorous in her power to plan and execute. She is among strangers. She does not wish to bring herself officiously into notice, nor take work from other hands, and yet such are the promptings of her nature that she cannot long remain idle. She sees the terrible work of intemperance among us. She prepares an appeal to rumsellers. It is printed over the signatures of

more than one thousand ladies of this city and circulated among them. They are also visited by committees of the ladies, and had the plan, so excellent in its inception, been vigorously followed up, doubtless more would have been accomplished. This effort was substantially the same thing as the present woman's temperance movement in the west, with only the praying and singing added. Mrs. Worcester may without injustice to others be considered as among the pioneers in New England in this somewhat novel, yet in many respects effective, method of reaching this gigantic evil. She early saw what rare gifts and opportunities woman possesses for certain kinds of reformatory work, which largely baffle the skill of men and the behests of the law. Two years later, she organizes the Ladies' Union Lecture Club of this city, drafts its constitution and by-laws and breathes life and efficiency into it. Her large acquaintance with lecturers in connection with her own gifts, gave her uncommon advantages for this work. The story of what she has done for the last three winters I need not now repeat. It is known to you all. Nor would I give her one iota of credit that rightfully belongs to others. She had willing and efficient helpers, in whom she confided and who confided in her, and yet she carried on her own heart the whole responsibility; not because she wanted all the honor, but because she well understood that in the execution of a plan one mind is better than many.

I am reluctant to believe and yet I fear that her intense devotion to this work overtaxed her strength and possibly hastened her departure. Conscious of pure intentions, of unswerving fidelity, and of a desire to benefit the people among whom she lived, reflection upon the work of the last

three years brought her no regrets. So kindly in her feelings was she that she wanted to please everybody and made great sacrifices to do it. If I mistake not, the secret of her success in whatever she undertook lay in this: her uncommon executive ability, the giving of her personal attention to the matter in hand, care of the smallest details, and to crown all, a persistent following up until the thing was accomplished. In these qualities which she exhibited, we discover the only genius that is really worth much in such a world as this.

And this leads me to gather up concisely the features of her portrait. Mrs. Worcester was a strongly marked character. She drew your attention at once. She had what we call individuality. She was a natural leader. Some can follow better than they can lead. She could lead better than she could follow. Others quickly saw this and cheerfully accorded to her the palm of leadership which she always bore gracefully. She was self-reliant. She was always glad of help, but could go alone. She was a positive character. She had opinions and was not afraid to express them. She made herself felt in every circle in which she moved by the native forcefulness of her own will and the weight of her own personality. She was firm in her convictions but not obstinate. Her firmness came of clear conceptions of truth and of duty. She was like a woman in the quickness of her instincts of right and like a man in the deliberation with which she marched step by step to her conclusion. She exhibited a rare combination of these qualities.

She was tenacious of her own opinion, if you please, and now and then perhaps a little impatient of opposition, and yet she recognized the rights of private opinion in others as well

as in herself, and never rudely interfered with them. She was too much of a lady to do this. Refined in her tastes and manners she had a keen sense of honor, and was minutely attentive to all the amenities of social life. She had the culture which comes not alone from reading and intercourse with the world, but which belongs to and crowns a thoroughly sincere character, what I will call the culture of truth. She lived in the atmosphere of truth; it was the daily food of her soul. She was just what she appeared to be. There was no cunning about her, no artful dodging of fair questions, no lame excuses for shirking duty, no weak jealousies lest others might outstrip her. She accomplished her ends by honest words and direct methods, and she loved to have others do the same. She would not wear a disguise, her soul was too pure and broad. She trusted others and wanted to have others trust her. I have already spoken of her systematic habit. She carried this into everything, into all her household arrangements and daily work no less than into her more public labors. She was eminently progressive in her spirit and methods.

She believed in a future for mankind better than the present. On this subject she was in advance of the average public sentiment, and hence to some extent shared with all reformers in their feeling of impatience with the slow progress of the race towards better things. She sought especially to elevate her own sex, to lift them above the frivolities of fashion and the misery of having nothing to do, and to inspire them with high and noble views of life.

The cause of temperance in this city has lost one of its best friends and most devoted helpers. How often have I heard her lament over the desolations of drunkenness among

us, and ask in a beseeching tone of voice that went right to your heart, "Cannot something be done to save these families and these young men and young women from the curse of intemperance." Most gladly would she have renewed the effort she made soon after coming to this city, had her strength permitted. She was truly benevolent. She loved everybody, even the humblest. She was ready to give of her means to relieve suffering. Many are the poor families in this community who will not soon forget her quiet deeds of kindness, and who, I doubt not, are among the sincerest mourners over her death. During her last sickness, fearing lest her motives might be misunderstood, she said to me with great emphasis, "I have not been selfish; I have not thought of myself; I have tried in my humble way to do this people good." And who of us can doubt it?

I now turn to a more pleasing part of this humble tribute to her memory, to speak of her Christian character. Mrs. Worcester was not alone distinguished for intellectual and moral force. She was more than this. She was a Christian woman. This fact concerning her was perhaps less prominent than the other points to which I have called your attention, and on this account any attempt to portray her religious character is rendered exceedingly delicate and difficult. To her the experiences of the inner life were sacred. She only spoke of them to her nearest friends, and even then with great caution. Another reason why it is so difficult to speak in detail of her religious life, is because she herself never separated it from her daily and secular duties. The cast of her mind and the habit of her life were eminently religious, and everything she did bore the sanction and threw off the fragrance of religion. It is almost always true that wherever

we find such qualities of mind and of heart as she possessed, working out in all benevolent ways, we find underlying them and giving them force and effectiveness a pronounced religious nature. The fear of God, the love of Him and his word, and a steadfast purpose to live in conformity with His will, are essential elements in the strongest and best type of human character. Hence, while seeking for the explanation of such an earnest and fruitful life, we are not surprised to find that it roots back into the Christian religion. We expected it. Her religion was less in theory than in practice. She was not wanting in faith, while she was eminent for works. She believed that religion relates to life and that the life of religion is to do good, and in this she was right. She fully agreed with Paul that "faith without works is dead being alone."

Her Christian life dates from early womanhood. While residing in her native town she united with the Orthodox Congregational church, then under the pastoral care of the Rev. Dr. Park, and never removed her relation. We regret that we cannot give in her own words the way by which she was led into the kingdom. Some years after, having read the works of Emanuel Swedenborg, she embraced to some extent his views, particularly with reference to the enlarged inner sense of the Bible and the doctrine of the future life. This may have thrown her somewhat out of sympathy with the current Evangelical belief, and have brought unjust suspicions upon her in the minds of some. No doubt her new church views well suited her cast of mind and helped to give a marked vigor and efficiency to her religious life. She honestly believed that through them she drank deeper of the spiritual meaning of Scripture and that they brought her into closer relations with her Heavenly Father and with the spirit

world. She thought more of the spirit than of the letter. To her the letter was simply the key that unlocked the spiritual treasure-house. In the "daily bread" of the Lord's prayer, she also found the food for which her soul hungered. Let us be just and generous. As our faces and constitutions differ, so there are different ways of looking at the same truth. Some are satisfied with old and narrow views; others strike out into new and broader fields. Some sip all their life at the outer and shallow border of the fountain, while others seek the deep and clear water where they can drink satisfying draughts. Some think that assent to a particular system of doctrine is requisite to salvation—while others, regarding all systems as fallible, prefer to fasten their faith upon a few central truths, waiting for more light to be poured upon the rest. She belonged to the latter class. In matters non-essential to personal salvation, we have no right to require others to stretch themselves upon our theological bed. We ought to be thankful that the tests of Christian character and the qualifications of church membership, so far as belief in a whole system of doctrine is concerned, are so much simpler than they were in the olden times, and that now we can recognize the image of Christ and the spirit of a true disciple in those who may honestly differ from us touching some minor points.

The truth needful to salvation is simple. The faith that takes hold of it may be feeble and dim. The trembling child who is almost afraid to call Jesus Savior, and whom the visible church in her ignorance may cast out, the omniscient Father will accept. In our day as never before, the life is the real test. We are all growing more and more suspicious of any claims to Christian character, that are not supported

by a consistent life. It avails little to subscribe to a creed, though it is as long and as logical as Paul's letter to the Romans, if the life gives denial. This was the view our Christian friend took of this matter, and she was right.

Mrs. Worcester never surrendered her faith in Christ. It was the root and spring of her life no less than of the life of every disciple. When I asked her if she believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, she instantly and earnestly replied, "I have always believed in Him, and in the need of His blood for the forgiveness of sins. I have no other ground of hope." This is enough. The person who can say this from the heart, and whose life corresponds, is a Christian, and has an indisputable right to come to the table of Christ, and moreover ought to come.

She wanted to live a little longer, if it was her Father's will, that she might do more good. In the early part of her sickness, her mind seemed to waver between this world and the next, and was, at times, somewhat clouded.

On one occasion, when at her bedside, she said to me, "Pray that I may have more light from the Kingdom." God graciously answered this prayer, the cloud lifted, the light came.

During the last week her mind was sweetly serene and peaceful, like the unruffled bosom of the deep, when it greets the last lingering sunbeam of setting day. She has found the rest for which she sighed. She has entered upon the great hereafter, which is the glorious consummation and crown of the present, where faith becomes vision and hope reality.

Why then should we shrink from death, or try to hold our friends back? If we live as we may and ought, death is only a blessing, since it is the gateway to the perfect and everlasting kingdom.

Her loss to us with whom she worshipped, and to this community at large, is only surpassed by her loss to her husband. In his great bereavement, we tender him our sincere condolence.

There have been few lives among us in which there was so little that we could wish to blot out. The six years of her residence here has marked an epoch in the history of this city. She has left her impress upon us, which thrice six years cannot efface.

In my closing word, let me exhort other women among us to be like-minded. Not necessarily to copy her methods of activity, but to cherish her pure and generous spirit, and seek to realize her lofty ends—then shall her influence be continued and multiplied, and her death prove not only a gain to herself, but to us also.